

**USDA Farm Bill Listening Session
Under Secretary Mr. Mark Rey
Douglas, Wyoming
August 18, 2005
Testimony of
Mr. Olin Sims, Second Vice-President
National Association of Conservation Districts**

Thank you Mr. Under-Secretary for the opportunity to appear before you today and share my thoughts on the 2007 Farm Bill. I'd like to speak to the question of conservation needs in the next Farm Bill

My name is Olin Sims, an ag producer here in Wyoming, a Rural Supervisor on the Medicine Bow Conservation District, but speaking today as the Second Vice-President of the National Association of Conservation Districts - I am here representing the nations 3000 Conservation Districts and the nearly 17000 elected and appointed officials charged with protecting the nations soil and water resources at the local level.

I would like to take this opportunity to stress the importance of the Conservation Title of the current Farm Bill and encourage you to help us see that a strong Conservation Title is provided for in the 2007 Farm Bill.

The ag industry, working collectively with their local Conservation District and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service has done an outstanding job of enhancing our soil and water resources utilizing the conservation programs available in the current Farm Bill - and we need to ensure the industry and the nation that this same assistance is available in the future.

It is critical that we provide our ag producers with adequate conservation technical assistance through the NRCS to help produce an ample food supply while protecting and enhancing our soil, water and air resources. Many producers utilize this assistance from the NRCS without requiring financial assistance to make conservation minded decisions when working their lands. This type of assistance is critical. It seems that Conservation Technical Assistance is often overlooked; please let me assure you it is an extremely vital component to a viable conservation delivery program.

Our job is two fold, first we must see that adequate TA is available to the NRCS for Farm Bill conservation program work, but just as important is adequate assistance for non-program work. The ability for a producer to call the local field office for simple assistance outside of a program is crucial to our mission of being good stewards to the land. We must see that Technical Assistance is adequately provided for in our next Farm Bill.

The current Farm Bill programs have helped ag producers develop thousands of acres of new wetlands, has protected millions of acres of highly erodable lands, provided for

irrigation efficiency projects in times of drought here in the West, has helped producers develop sustainable grazing systems – all these programs have worked well to conserve our natural resources and have been fully embraced by our ag producers – we must ensure these programs are available in the next Farm bill.

The Farm Bill conservation programs currently available such as the Environmental Quality Incentive Program has help producers bring their operations into compliance with federal rules such as the AFO/CAFO rule to meet the demands of the Federal Clean Water Act. This technical and financial assistance helps both the stability of the ag industry and also is an investment into the enhancement of our natural resources for the future. These programs are sound for the environment and our local economies.

The 2007 Farm Bill needs to address issues adequately across the board from cropland conservation to grazing and grasslands issues, from forestland enhancement programs on private lands to helping producers shift their operations to renewable fuels development and production – but most of all making sure we keep America's lands working.

Urban conservation needs must be considered as our municipalities grow and consume more and more of our working ag lands. Storm water runoff, flood control and open spaces are critical concerns as urban America continues to grow.

Mr. Under-Secretary – the National Association of Conservation Districts has formed a Farm Bill Task Force and is currently working with our member districts across the nation to gather input and direction for the 2007 Farm Bill. We stand ready and look forward to working with you and the members of congress as the next Farm Bill starts to take shape.

As an officer of NACD, I would like to commend you Mr. Rey and the members of your shop at USDA for being such good partners to work with. Chief Bruce Knight and his leadership staff are excellent partners at the national level and the NRCS staff at the state and local field office levels are strong partners in conservation. We are glad to be a component of this partnership, working with you to achieve natural resource conservation in America.

Thank you again for coming to Wyoming and providing this opportunity to share my thoughts with you today.

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